

Literary interpretation and critique paper tim o'brien's the things they carried ...

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* is a fusion of stories derived from both fact and fiction regarding the Vietnam War, which conveys the emotions and experiences of a soldier during and after the war. The title of the book is associated to the author's description of characters not by their personality, but by the items they carried (O'Brien 7).

The main narrative device in the book is repetition, which is employed by the author through creation of a slightly surreal yet factual ambience for the reader. For example, the author repeats the phrases "the things they carried" and "they carried" throughout the book. O'Brien tells the story interchangeably as his present self and through "Tim the soldier who describes the experiences of O'Brien through a second person narrative" (Nagel 130).

The result is an alternating form of realism and imagination, which the author acknowledges when he states that "the thing about a story is that you dream it as you tell it, hoping that others might then dream along with you, and in this way memory and imagination and language combine to make spirits in the head. There is the illusion of aliveness." (O'Brien 230).

In reference to the statement, the author in essence questions the actuality of a "true war story," which is also sustained by the fact that according to Tim, his story is merely a dream (Beidler 122). "O'Brien creates an element of doubt in the book by interlinking fact and fiction by extensively employing imagination and reality" (Nagel 128-129).

For example, in chapter eleven "The Man I Killed," he imagines that the man he has killed "was born in 1946. His parents were farmers. He was neither a Communist nor a fighter and all he hoped for was that the Americans would go away...He had delicate fingers and might have been a scholar.

The other boys at school might have teased him because he may have had a woman's walk and a love for mathematics" (O'Brien 129-130). However, in the chapter titled "Notes" O'Brien goes on to define real events in his life such as in 1975 when he received a handwritten letter from Norman Bowker that describes the effects of the war on a former soldier and encouraged O'Brien to write about the effects of the Vietnam War (Nagel 138).

The difficulty in writing truth about war arises from the fact that wartime conditions are unstable, rushed and marred with confusion. A soldier's emotions and senses are exclusively focused to staying alive and conquering the enemy which "creates a 'tunnel-vision' mindset, superseding senses associated with hindsight and recollection" (Nagel 142). In addition, soldiers are trained to be brave and confident but, as humans, they are still "prone to natural reactions such as fear and cowardice in addition to fatal mistakes such as killing a fellow soldier by mistake" (Nagel 142).

However, the acknowledgement of such a mistake may lead to criticism or punishment, which compels soldiers to only "portray their actions as heroic regardless of their experiences" (Nagel 145). As a result, the stories of war are biased which greatly compromises the integrity of facts, which is possibly "the main reason why narrator Tim states he will conceal parts of Jimmy

Cross' story" (Nagel 151). The truth is especially slanting when war occurs in an isolated region such as Vietnam as compared to a large-scale war such as World War II.

The writer applies diction to achieve in creating more vivid events to emphasize on the emotions in a certain event. This is so because he wants to sway the audience to feel what he felt. For example, in the story Good Form, O'Brien gives reasons why he tells stories. " What stories can do, I guess, is make things present. I can look at things I never looked at. I can attach faces to grief and love and pity and God. I can be brave. I can make myself feel again." (180)

The writer emphasizes on how his emotions can be expressed in both imaginary and fiction narrations. To achieve in making a story important, he must express his feelings by narrating the event in a way that influences the reader's perception by placing a reader on the battle field and this is achieved by effective enunciation (Ringnalda 78).

O'Brien uses imagery in his writing, for example in " The Man I Killed", the author writes, " His jaw was in his throat, his upper lip and teeth were gone, his one eye was shut, his other eye was a star shaped hole, his eyebrows were thin and arched like a woman's..." (124).

This is a clear description of use of imagery as a figure of speech. Imagery exactly captures and expresses feelings to the audience by creation of images in the audience mind. Juxtaposition is another figure speech that is able to express fiction importance by fully showing how similar and close it is

to reality in a story. O'Brien explains how in a happening-truth that "there were many bodies, real bodies with real faces, but I was young then and I was afraid to look" (180). In this statement, the writer explains the reality of the story as if he was still there (Biess and Moeller 45).

When Norman circles the lake in his hometown, having in mind all the things he had lost it symbolizes Norman as a satellite that is unable to resist the magnetic force of the lake. Finally, when he submerges himself in the lake, it symbolizes his later suicide. In 'Field Trip', the narrator judges the field with the same old emotions, not knowing the outcome would not be the same.

Embarking to the location of Kiowa's death twenty years later, he is surprised to find the field at peace and more strangely is the absence of the feeling he felt whenever he was approached with the place that has symbolized everything vulgar and violent from his past.

Surprisingly, when the narrator enters into the fields, he re-emerges with a new outlook, finally having freed himself from the shackles of bitterness the fields were redesigned for baptism and he cleansed himself from the destruction of the war (Beidler 132). Mark Fossie's lover who is from America is a symbol of the goodness in America. In "Sweetheart of Song Tra Bong", however, reflects the changes that happen to the innocent girl. When she is trans-located from Cleveland suburbs and settles on the mountains of Vietnam.

The occurrence of the war and the loud silence of the mountain have a seductive effect on the young girl. Once innocent girl is now able to amass

instinctive ransacks and to lock off channels, the innocence she had fades so does the love Mark had for her. She rubs off her youthful dreams of getting married to Mark after his return and they finally separate (Biess and Moeller 55).

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